



Dennis Patterson Photos

**Dr. Joseph Murdock explains risks.**

## Physician explains how malpractice prevents practice

By **SHARON MORREY**  
Herald Staff Writer

Dr. K. Joe Murdock enjoyed delivering babies.

It's one of the truly joyous aspects of practicing as a family care physician.

But Murdock isn't delivering babies anymore.

The high cost of malpractice insurance and the new tension level in the delivery room has driven him out, along with his brother, Dr. Dale Murdock of Pleasant Grove, and fellow physicians across the country. "By stopping last year, I didn't have to pay an OB tail fee," explained Murdock.

The tail fee is twice the last annual premium amount, paid to protect the doctor against any suits that may be brought by patients delivered up to the point that coverage was dropped.

Murdock's costs for insurance climbed from several hundred dollars to \$5000 in one year and then jumped again to \$15,000 last year when insurance companies began charging family practitioners the same rate obstetricians are charged.

"That was 60 to 70 percent of the reason I decided to quit delivering babies," explained Murdock.

babies and never had a lawsuit brought against him.

Now every single delivery is a possible lawsuit, said Murdock.

And the atmosphere in the delivery room has completely changed.

"It's like you're delivering a baby in a courtroom."

Murdock explains that where the nurse and doctor were always a team, more often now it's an uncomfortable feeling of watching one another for error.

The doctor doesn't dare leave while the patient is laboring. He or she is essentially tied to the delivery all the way through, regardless of how many hours are involved — or how many other patients are waiting to be seen.

For Murdock, it isn't worth the aggravation to continue although he misses being part of the delivery of new life.

"It is one of the most positive aspects of the medical profession. With everything else, there's something wrong and you're trying to fix it. In maternity, the results are so joyful.

"I miss out not delivering."